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SUBJECT: BOMBINGS TARGET NONDESCRIPT ISTANBUL NEIGHBORHOOD

REF: 07/28/08 RSO SPOT REPORT

¶1. Two bombs exploded within minutes of each other on the night of July 27 killing at least 17 people and wounding more than 150 (see ref) in the Istanbul residential neighborhood of Gungoren. Gungoren is a lower-middle-class to middle-class neighborhood in Istanbul's western suburbs virtually indistinguishable from other nearby neighborhoods.

¶2. Like much of the city, Gungoren underwent rapid development due to urban migration in the 1950s and 60s, transforming what was once a largely industrial area into a residential district. Today, 271,000 people live in the six-to seven-story apartment buildings that line the neighborhood's narrow streets, making the area moderately crowded by Istanbul standards. With the exception of the international airport, there is little in any of Istanbul's western suburbs, including Gungoren, that would attract tourists.

¶3. Neither Gungoren nor its surrounding districts have a considerable Kurdish population. Media reports indicate some of the culprits from the 2003 Istanbul bombings came from the nearby neighborhood of Bagcilar. The three gunmen who attacked the Consulate General on July 9 lived in Kucukcekmece, a neighborhood further to the west beyond the airport. In December 2007, Kucukcekmece was the site of a series of arson attacks on parked cars. Both Bagcilar and Kucukcekmece are poorer than Gungoren. Politically Gungoren is dominated by the AKP and CHP. The parties received 50 and 30.5 percent of the vote respectively in the 2007 parliamentary elections.

¶4. The Turkish National Police have not speculated on the identity or affiliation of the bombers. Press speculation however is rife, with most commentators at a loss to explain why terrorists would target a neighborhood as nondescript as Gungoren.

OUDKIRK